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DELAY IS GRANTED IN SPY SENTENCING

Officials Gain Time to Weigh Truthfulness of Walkers on Origins of Navy Ring

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 29 — A Federal district judge in Baltimore agreed today to delay the sentencing of John A. Walker Jr. for more than a month while prosecutors try to determine if the Navy veteran is lying about the extent and origin of his family's Soviet spy ring.

Judge Alexander Harvey postponed sentencing until Nov. 6 for Mr. Walker and his son, Michael, a former Navy seaman who has also confessed in the case.

They were originally scheduled to be sentenced Friday under a plea bargain that could hasten parole. Federal law-enforcement officials have said that the plea agreement was in jeopardy because of questions about John Walker's truthfulness.

Breckinridge L. Willcox, the United States Attorney for Maryland, said in a written statement that the postponement had been requested by the Navy "in order to allow the Navy's damage assessment team additional time to attempt to ascertain the facts concerning the commencement and extent of the espionage conspiracy."

According to Reagan Administration officials, the delay will permit the Justice Department to study Mr. Walker's answers to questions about the origins of a spy ring that has been described as one of the most damaging in the nation's history.

Department officials have said that polygraph, or lie-detector, tests found Mr. Walker and his brother, Arthur, deceptive on those questions.

Arthur Walker, a retired Navy lieutenant commander, was convicted of espionage last year and sentenced to life imprisonment.

No More Delays, Lawyer Says

A source knowledgeable about the case said that Justice Department and defense lawyers met with Judge Harvey at the Federal courthouse in Baltimore this afternoon.

The prosecution, the source said, urged a delay in sentencing, citing growing concerns about John Walker's credibility.

Mr. Walker's chief defense lawyer, Fred Warren Bennett, said in an interview that he had participated in the meeting and had objected to delaying the sentencing until November.

Although the judge sided with prosecutors and agreed to the extended delay, Mr. Bennett said that Judge Harvey told lawyers in the case that he would not permit any further postponements.

At the request of prosecutors, the judge had delayed the sentencing once before.

Sources familiar with the case said that lie detector tests would continue this week for the fourth Navy veteran charged in the case, Jerry A. Whitworth.

Mr. Whitworth, a former communications officer, has been found largely truthful in his statements about the spy ring, one source said. After a trial this summer, Mr. Whitworth was convicted of espionage and sentenced to 365 years in prison.

In Baltimore, where the case against John and Michael Walker has been prosecuted, investigators were scheduled to meet again this week with Arthur Walker.

Arthur Walker's Role Questioned

Law-enforcement officials said that Arthur Walker was to be transported to Baltimore for additional questions about his involvement in the spy ring.

According to the officials, the Justice Department is concerned that Arthur Walker organized the spy ring and participated in espionage in his Navy career.

John Walker has asserted that he was the ringleader and recruited Arthur Walker only after his brother's retirement from the military in the early 1970's.

Under the plea bargain, John Walker would receive a life sentence; his son would be sentenced to 25 years in prison. The agreement could permit them to go free on parole years earlier.

Administration officials said the Justice Department and the Pentagon were once again battling over the case.

Justice Department officials have indicated that they lacked sufficient evidence to ask Judge Harvey to overturn the plea bargain. Polygraph results would not be sufficient, they said.

But according to Administration officials, the Navy believes there is adequate evidence to prove that Mr. Walker has lied.

Opposition From Navy

Senior Navy officers, they said, want the Justice Department to consider abandoning the plea agreement and putting the Walkers on trial, which could lead to more substantial punishments.

The Secretary of the Navy, John F. Lehman Jr., originally opposed the agreement, saying it was too lenient. "It continues a tradition in the Justice Department of treating espionage as just another white-collar crime," he said last fall.

In recent days, Secretary Lehman has declined to comment on the Walker case.

But Administration officials have said they believe that Secretary Lehman sees the current dispute over Mr. Walker's truthfulness as an opportunity to end the plea agreement.